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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, S/CRS, SE WILLIAMSON
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: TAWILA INCIDENT AS UNAMID TEST CASE IN PROTECTION OF
CIVILIANS

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Violence in Tawila, North Darfur on May 12, threatens to create a humanitarian crisis if left unchecked and unaddressed by the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). An interagency UNAMID team plans to travel to the region on May 15 to do an assessment and to map out the way forward on arguably the most fundamental yet currently the most murky of UNAMID's mandated responsibilities - protection of civilians. END SUMMARY.

VIOLENCE IN SENSITIVE DARFUR LOCATION

12. (SBU) At 0800 on May 12 in the central market in Tawila (approximately 60km north of El Fasher in North Darfur), a Government of Sudan (GoS) paramilitary officer (one Abbas Zacaria) was shot in the head and killed by two Central Reserve Police members [NOTE: UNAMID J3 reported on May 13 that the perpetrators were Sudan Liberation Army/Abdelwahid (SLA/AW) members who were put up to the task by SLA/Minni Minawi (SLA/MM) members. Tawila is home to several SLA factions, in addition to Arab militias and other assorted bad guys. Tawila is also rife with tensions between the ethnic Zaghawa and Fur tribes. The UNAMID Humanitarian Liaison Officer reported that the GoS officer had been beaten to death, vice shot. END NOTE].

13. (SBU) Following the killing, at approximately 1100, GoS paramilitary officers retaliated by shooting into the air in the Tawila market and by entering Tawila IDP camps, where they were reported as looting and setting fire to shelters; UNAMID had photos taken at 1400 showing burnt structures in the camp. This action caused at least 500 IDPs to flee their homes, seeking refuge in and around the UNAMID Tawila Company Headquarters [NOTE: In the past, residents of Tawila have traditionally sought refuge right outside the AMIS military camp (now the UNAMID Tawila company). The humanitarian community deemed that area unsafe, and AMIS had objected to service provisions to these IDPs in order to avoid settling IDPs immediately outside the base. A minimum of services were nonetheless provided, but the location is not intended to be a long-term camp. END NOTE]. On May 15 UNAMID Tawila Company Commander reported that the number of IDPs at the company location had increased "by the thousands." UNAMID also reported rumors of SLA/MM coercion to push additional IDPs into the Tawila company location.

TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH

14. (SBU) As of May 15, tensions remained high between GoS and SLA forces in Tawila. UNAMID reported that since the GoS considered SLA/MM to be behind the attack, it told UNAMID it would pull out of Tawila only after taking over SLA/MM positions and offices in the area, which it alleged to have done on May 14, forcing SLA/MM to retreat to the hills outside Tawila, where that group was said to be planning reprisal attacks. A convoy of at least 80 GoS military

vehicles was reportedly moving outside Tawila toward Jebel Eisa (an SLA/AW stronghold) at 1700 on May 14. According to SLA/MM reps, the Wali of North Darfur and his North Darfur security committee had traveled to Malha, North Darfur, on May 13, to convene a meeting with the local officials before this convoy arrived. SLA/MM reps predicted targeting of areas in Jebel Eisa, Hara, Hilif, Dardiefa, Ein Bissaro and Khattan.

15. (SBU) IDPs from Tawila have refused to return to their camp for lack of security. UNAMID Humanitarian Liaison Officer convened a meeting on the morning of May 14 including UNAMID military, police and human rights representatives, as well as reps from OCHA ahead of a planned mission to Tawila on May 15 [NOTE: This mission had originally been scheduled for May 14, but due to the GoS decision to ground UN flights from El Fasher, it had to be re-scheduled. END NOTE].

TAWILA AS TEST CASE

16. (SBU) The Humanitarian Liaison Officer was concerned by the lack of understanding on the part of UNAMID in Tawila on how to deal with the IDP situation that was, in his estimation, fast threatening to become a humanitarian crisis with regard to protection of civilians and assurance of safety and security for IDPs. "These IDPs don't need assistance," he asserted. "They need protection," and stressed that protection of civilians was a fundamental part of UNAMID's mandate. The Liaison Officer, with the help of the UNAMID Military Chief of Staff, had drafted a paper on protection of civilians that was approved as a guideline for the Mission and that would serve as the basis for the May 15 assessment. He noted that the assessment team would include not only military, police, humanitarian and human rights components, but Civil Affairs and Political Affairs as well.

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17. (SBU) The Humanitarian Liaison was firm that UNAMID must address this protection situation head-on, as Tawila represented not only the original epicenter of the Darfur crisis (Tawila, with its strategic location, was the site of some of the deadliest battles in the Darfur conflict), but also a "flashpoint," given its proximity to El Fasher and its current status as a case study for UNAMID's ability to respond to protection concerns.

18. (SBU) The Humanitarian Liaison was concerned that troops on the ground did not seem to exhibit the training or will to deal with this type of issue, and he was equally worried that the Deputy Force Commander himself considered UNAMID assets to be insufficient to deal with this type of problem. Nevertheless, the mission is expected to proceed on May 15 as a way of establishing standard operating procedures for UNAMID's response capacity and verification mechanisms.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Despite the tendency to wince at the idea that UNAMID might not be up to the fundamental task of protecting civilians at risk, there is a slight silver lining. While the Deputy Force Commander may "Not be focusing on this problem as it suggests that the UNAMID might become the rule rather than the exception and will likely include those military types who need reminding on occasion of the root of their mission in Darfur. This case will be particularly difficult to adjudicate because it does not fit the clear pattern of "Khartoum regime preying on innocent civilians". Like much of the violence in Darfur now, it involves a tangled constellation of rebel groups and militias allied or opposed to the government - at least on paper - and competing tribal agendas (such as tension between Fur and Zaghawa, both "victims" of much earlier Darfur violence) stoked or manipulated by the regime. END COMMENT.

FERNANDEZ